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## ABSTRACT

A South African ministry invited the Centre for Adult Education in Durban to conduct a nonformal adult educator training course for its staff. During the 10-session course, the adult educators attempted to persuade the ministry staff that although their approach to education, which was based on acceptance rather than questioning and on a single view rather than on multiple perspectives, is adequate for teaching the gospel and instilling faith, it is inappropriate and ineffective for teaching life skills, counseling, and facilitating recovery. The adult educators based their training sessions on three educational strategies: the learner-centered approach, role modeling, and experiential learning activities. The participants' responses to the training sessions were very positive; however, the adult educators who conducted the training concluded that although the ministry staff will likely reproduce mechanically the teaching strategies presented during the training sessions, their attitudes toward teaching will probably remain unchanged for three reasons: the ministers' failure to perceive any need to change their attitude toward teaching, the contradictions between the "secular" methodology of the adult educators and the ministers' dogma-based approach, and the lack of sufficient time to teach the experiential learning approach. (MN)

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PREACHING TO THE UNCONVERTED - DIALOGUE VS DOCTRINE IN THE  
MINISTRY or: You cannot put cucumbers into a vinegar barrel and  
not expect them to emerge as pickles  
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## Introduction

What happens when two adult educator activists, believers in the experiential approach to teaching, who spend their working lives assisting people with designing and facilitating educational interactions which aim at critical, fully responsible individuals within a caring democratic context, meet a group of believers in Christ who spend their lives living in an institution and dispensing information which they consider the only viable truth and necessary basis for leading a worthwhile life? Both groups of contestants are in the same business of trying to effect attitude changes. In the Ministry, staff are concerned with faith; in the University, staff are concerned with critical analysis.

This paper is a description of such a meeting. It is based on a non-formal training adult educators course, which ran over 10 three and a half hour sessions, with staff members of what I shall call 'The ministry'. It was designed and conducted by Pauline Stanford and myself, and the paper reflects our ongoing dialogue which was the breeding ground for the course and the teaching and learning that happened in it. Subsequently, the dialogue was extended to some of the staff members in the Centre for Adult Education and other people around me, and I must thank them for their interest and ideas.

The paper is written from my perspective: it is a reflection on the applicability of my tools of the trade in a context which contradicts the underlying foundations of a dialogical approach to teaching. The paper is thus less a critique of the institution than a critical appraisal of what happens when two conflicting educational methodologies which belong to totally different contexts meet, and it is a challenge to the assumption that popular education methodology is effective and appropriate for working on attitude changes.

## Introducing the context and contestants

"All learning occurs in a particular social, cultural and political context and this influences what is learnt and the ways in which it is learnt." (Warner-Weill, p.42) In order to understand the educational encounter between the staff of the Ministry and the educators from the university it is necessary to briefly sketch the different contexts within which they operate

and the methodologies which determine the choices they make.

### 1. The Ministry

The Ministry is geographically situated apart from the main urban area of Durban: it is next to the harbour bay on the one side, and close to the harbour entrance and beaches on the other. It is fringed by vacant land, where marginalised people erect temporary shelters for the night.

It's historical origins were as a municipal compound and architecturally the building has central inner courtyards, surrounded by high dark face-brick buildings. It is physically set apart from it's surroundings by a wall. The only entrance and exit is guarded at all times and people who wish to enter are searched for the 'worldly possessions' which in many cases caused their demise: alcohol, drugs, weapons, sex and rock'n roll. Anyone entering also deposits temporarily his/her personal life and history, and problems of unemployment and homelessness.

Any destitute or homeless person can take up residence. The population 'inside' is multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-lingual, across the spectrum of class. In exchange for free board and lodging, some skills training and child and health care, residents have to commit themselves to the rules of the institution: they have to keep busy, which means helping with the maintenance of the institution and possibly learning a simple trade; they have to keep clean - a daily shower and make-up for the women (sic); they have to abandon habits which are in conflict with Christian life, which means fornication. They also have to sign up for a 50day Bible course. This is to equip them with the tools of a clean Christian life. It is also the great 'leveller' that brings all diversity of background, both in terms of personal and social history, under one roof: it signals the creation of a community with clear reference points and a defined identity.

The world inside is complete: physical needs are taken care of in that residents are allocated a place to sleep, given clothes and ready-made food, their health is checked by a resident nurse and visiting doctors, their life is structured by a clear time-table of daily activities and routines, and a number of reference people who will 'counsel' them should they find it hard to conform. Spiritual needs are taken care of through the doctrine and enforced by rules and regulations. Emotional needs are dealt with through ever-ready quotes from the Bible and encouragement to pray and smile: "Jesus loves you."

Coming from the world outside with it's multitude of demands, choices, responsibilities, and problems the Ministry represents a haven of ordered life. People are given a chance to concentrate on regaining their strength and hope and they are supported by a powerful doctrine which they must experience as practical and workable. After all: any basic needs are met through the power of

prayer - God works His miracles, whether they be daily food, more wheelbarrows for the building project, a holiday for the Pastor's wife, study fees for a resident, someone who can speak Zulu and serve as a translator or experts such as adult educators from the university. There is enough food donated by a wide range of people and organisations, a ticket to Capetown, Zulu-speaking Chris and Pauline and Astrid from the University.

It is clear, that the whole system is maintained through a powerful internal discourse which regulates who speaks, when, for how long and on what. This discourse operates with a fixed value-system and clear points of reference. The regime's life and obedience to it is justified through a series of charismatic prophecies and what Michel Foucault calls 'technologies of power'. The organisational structure of the Ministry is hierarchical and essentially autocratic; it is justified through a powerful authoritarian personality code, "a rigid adherence to conventional morality, a submissive and uncritical attitude toward idealised, moral attitudes, a tendency to reject and punish people who violate conventional values, and a preoccupation with power relationships (for example, leader-follower, strong - weak)". (Zimbardo, et al. p.28)

Authority and morality exert a strong influence on the attitudes of the staff who maintain a structure of functionaries which ranges from the different pastors, to senior staff, to junior staff right down to maintenance staff in charge of more menial tasks. Inside this, we learnt about a pecking order and one of the minor 'successes' of the course was participants' conscientisation of how this top-down model inhibits their capacity to make informed choices and take responsibility for decisions.

The discourse is closed to anyone outside the doctrine or even the institution; we were told as much by the dean of the Bible School who had difficulties coming to terms with a problem-solving activity. "I have answers to all these questions", he said, meaning that if a learner was too passive, or lacked motivation, if she had difficulty concentrating or was illiterate he would offer appropriate citations from the Bible as a solution. "But you want me to answer these questions in your language". He revealed not only an unwillingness but also an inability to step out of his discourse. Not surprisingly, but sadly he dropped out after the first three sessions. Another participant explained to Pauline that she could not understand the dynamics of the Ministry, as she did not speak their language.

## 2. The educators

The educators came from an environment of many competing discourses. In terms of work and education, we are contextualised within the broader South African progressive union movement, political mass-mobilisation campaigns and have been nurtured in

democratic procedures and principles. The structural managerial expression of this discourse is essentially democratic. It lives within so-called progressive, democratic mass organisations and it is painstakingly preoccupied with counteracting anything that might smack of autocracy.

The educational discourse which informs our teaching is critical and questioning, where the Ministry's was accepting; it lives within and feeds on multi-perspectives rather than a single view and dogma. We are constantly engaged in exploring a multitude of different models. The learning that we initiate happens through interaction, discussion, dialogue, in an ongoing process of sharing ideas and viewpoints. As we uncover and critically examine contradictions and scrutinise beliefs for inconsistencies we are aware that this is a dangerous and uncomfortable framework which offers little solace to anyone searching for answers rather than more questions.

### 3. The Context

The Ministry had requested us to run a training course in adult education for their members of staff. Given the structure of the institution I cannot in retrospect imagine what educational consideration motivated them to invite us. Not only academic circles thrive on name-dropping the function of which is to lend credibility and authority. The authoritative voice that 'scientific research' and the names of experts from the university lend to an endeavour should not be underestimated. I have little doubt that this is one of the reasons for which we were called into the Ministry: to lend their 'adult education' an air of professionalism and hence greater credibility.

What we, the educators, targeted was not the doctrine or the institution; we acknowledged that the Ministry serves people whom society has discarded and that they fill a gap in ministering to those marginalised people. What we did want to challenge was their way of teaching, as we saw their approach adequate for teaching the gospel and instilling faith, but inappropriate and ineffective for teaching life skills, counselling and recovery.

What did we bring with us, and why did we think we would be able to effect a change in attitude towards their approach in teaching?

Firstly, we brought our assumptions: for example, that we would be dealing with a group of people who know each other well as they live and work together. We assumed that they wanted to learn how to teach, and that we had been invited in response to their expressed need. We didn't realise that participants had been disempowered to the extent that it later became apparent.

Secondly, we brought our faith in the supremacy of our

methodology. There is overwhelming evidence in the 'goodness' of an experiential approach: multitudes of books on the subject praise it's effectiveness and claim it is particularly appropriate in the education of adults. Umpteen case studies of success stories with the experiential approach add weight to the evidence. The progressive democratic movement in South Africa has adopted the discussion-based method and hours spent in small group discussions bear out it's popularity.

In terms of the context of the Ministry we knew that a 'practical approach' would appeal to the staff: they consider themselves people of action and anything that involves doing was received favourably. We argued that as participants enjoyed the sessions they would become more and more motivated to attend, and as they would recognise that learning can be fun so they would 'buy' into the methodology. We also believed that they might see how teaching critical problem-solving skills is doubly appropriate in this context as they provide people with some tools for making the transition from life inside the institution to life in the real world outside.

Thirdly, we brought our hope that our big 'bag of tricks' would contain enough activities which would not only be popular, but also effective. We had many exercises to chose from and the skills to allow the learners to provide relevant models for constructing learning experiences. We acknowledged that learning is not something that happens by itself: it has to be carefully planned, designed and managed by the teacher. Our sessions were the result of ponderous and carefully considered design: we made sure each activity would be followed by a review, we incorporated activities which functioned as checking mechanisms to demonstrate whether, what and how learning had happened. We provided a safe and supportive learning environment.

Recognising the criticism of experiential learning, that "it too often becomes games playing", that no real learning takes place because nothing has been gained which can be used outside the class or lecture-room" (Dennison / Kirk p.131) each session included a 'how can you apply this?' section, and later on in the course we had report-backs in which course participants shared their experiences with trying out the one or other method.

Fourthly, we felt confident that we could affect attitude change because we were received with a surprising openness and friendliness. If they had 'invited us in' expecting that we as the experts from the university would lecture to them, for hours on end, we countered by inviting them into the construction of the course: the knowledge that we work with is not a ready-made product but something which is evolved collectively in an ongoing process by them and us together: this would ensure relevance and ownership. And in as much as we helped them to build their confidence as teachers we asked them for suggestions of how they could boost the esteem of the residents.

Learners were ready to participate and they let us know that they appreciated our active involvement. And there were small measures of success which encouraged us to carry on trying - despite the creeping suspicion that within this dogmatic discourse there was no chance of changing anything.

From the outset course participants embraced the idea and process of discussions and participation. They saw the relevance of listening skills for their own practise as counsellors ("That's the problem - we don't know how to listen to each other! We are so pre-occupied with our own thinking") and as they carried topics under discussion into the tea-breaks they revealed a high degree of involvement and little bits of new insights and understanding. For example, in the first session the coordinator remarked rather tellingly that the introductory Bingo-game had been fantastic: he had observed people who had never before spoken to each other in brief conversations.

### The Action

I would like to give a few examples of strategies employed for effecting a change in attitude towards teaching.

#### 1. The learner-centred approach

We believe first impressions are important and we should set the climate of this course right, from the start. This meant withdrawing from the speaking position and inviting participation. Shor (1980) has described the psychological importance of learners' voices being dominant at the beginning of a course, as this signals clearly that dialogue will be between learners, rather than teacher and learner.

I agree with Rogers' (1971) assertion that learners can rarely identify their needs and the request to do so may cause anxiety rather than signal a positive message such as: you are important, so please have your say and we will take you seriously. We also wanted to give a clear signal that while we might be considered experts in the field of adult education, we knew nothing about their discourse and had a lot to learn from them and that we did not wish to threaten the dominant role they, as staff, occupied within the institution. It therefore seemed doubly important to throw the ball into their courts and allow them to tell us how we could be of service.

Through a snowballing process in which participants could choose the learning partners they felt comfortable with we asked them to focus on their learners' 'obstacles to learning' and their strengths. This exercise located the problems in their subjects rather than themselves and allowed them to speak about 'them' rather than 'us'. The discrepancies between what they wrote down on the worksheet (which we collected and returned after processing the information) and what they said in ensuing discussions made it quite clear that they had identified their own problems.

In terms of educational process this exercise functioned as an induction to cooperative learning which some of the participants immediately recognised as being in conflict with their way of teaching 'the truth'. The outcome generated information which as we pointed out, would form the basis for the course outline, bring us into closer contact with each other and build understanding - an important basis for role-modelling.

While we were at pains to emphasise that the control of the course must be in their hands, and we would therefore construct the course in consultation with them, they were clearly quite unfamiliar with such an approach and unsure how to respond to our request for information and guidance. Shor has described elsewhere (Shor/Freire;1989) how this approach places the control firmly into the hands of the learners: how the facilitator steps back from the expected position of power and hands over the process. Given we had been introduced to learners as 'the experts from the university' our behaviour of stepping back and listening was doubly puzzling. We had pulled the carpet out from under their expectations - but apart from a feeble voice suggesting "you know best what we need to learn" there was no challenge to our approach. It may be worth mentioning though that despite repeated invitations to do so we never got any concrete suggestions as to what course participants wanted to learn.

When we recognised that participants were locked into a system in which needs were identified by someone else who was 'in charge' of them, and that they firmly believed in a body of knowledge as a given, incontestable product which you either own, or don't have, we focused attention on the whole notion of knowledge as something which is constantly being produced and re-produced.

It was an unsuccessful exercise; participants could not concede that there may be different notions of what constitutes worthwhile knowledge and what did not. They responded with polite silence which said: there is only one body of worthwhile knowledge and truth and that had already been produced; their task was to reproduce it and help others to do likewise. In this context a learner-centred approach seems a contradiction in terms.

## 2. Role-modelling

Brookfield suggests, that "observing role models to help us imagine, define, and practise the kinds of behaviours we would like to exhibit in our own lives is one of the most common means by which we learn". (Brookfield, 1987 p.85)

One of the key principles with which the Ministry operates is role-modelling. The majority of staff members have a history of marginalisation through substance abuse and or unemployment. They make a point of letting other people know about this problem in their past and they ascribe it to the days when they lacked the Gospel. They are walking role-models that tell everyone around

them: look, we managed to change our lives through Christ, look how happy we are - this is what you are asked to do and you can do it just the same as we did.

In terms of those points of reference we represented a threat to the prevailing ideology, because we had 'made it'—despite not having embraced the Gospel. Recognising that from within those arguments participants would have to find reasons for rejecting us we had to work extra hard to establish ourselves as acceptable role models and we made it clear that we wanted to be evaluated as educators only.

What did we do to set up positive role-models?

- \* We de-mystified the notion adult educators from the university by being quite approachable, relaxed, open and friendly, and made it known that we like to operate in an atmosphere of sharing and cooperation with learners.

We engaged actively with learners, both in educational activities and during tea breaks.

- \* We were generally energetic and tried to imbue the sessions with a sense of excitement and positive energy. We attempted to show that unlike other familiar settings in which they were passive recipients, here participation and active involvement were rewarded.

- \* We actively de-mystified the process of designing and managing learning. We discussed how and why we had made choices and invited learners to try out for themselves how it feels to make those choices.

- \* We deliberately created many 'success' stories - experiences which lead to participants feeling good about themselves and the course. We focused on constructing self-confidence, rather than enforcing learning through punitive means. Part of this were alternative suggestions for testing procedures.

- \* We shared our resources, both in terms of information, skills and materials. We tried to create a sense that we were not withholding any secrets about education.

- \* We showed respect for their lives by allowing them to take charge of conversations. With some women I established a common base by talking about children and experiences of childcare. Trying to enter their discourse, I drew on my Christian background for common points of reference and in preparations sessions I searched for appropriate quotes and references. I hoped this would make me more acceptable and thus ease the way into following my model.

- \* We demonstrated the great variety of possibilities which exist with the experiential approach. For example, we explored how one can draw on existing resources for the production of teaching aids rather than having to rely on expensive equipment. This would also draw learners into taking charge of their own learning process.

The opening session drew enthusiastic responses: they were pleasantly surprised at what they had experienced: they had enjoyed the variation of activities, they felt safe that we were

not out to criticise their dogma, they liked the active learning through participation and they positively evaluated the fact that we, the teachers, had joined in. It became more difficult to reject us as we were not uppity and nasty. We tried to build on this initial response.

### 3. Experiential learning activities

The list of 'obstacles to learning' and strengths as learners was aimed at demonstrating how barriers can become valuable assets for learning, especially when people use their strengths as building blocks. Our 'normal' style of operation would have been to systematically target sample problems and design exercises which would lead to an understanding of the root causes which in turn could become the basis for a step by step problem-solving process.

Given the closed discourse from which we were excluded on the one hand, the expressed need to learn about how to better prepare residents for life outside on the other, we faced a contradiction which posed the threat of creating another, course-internal discourse, in which the reference points of any learning would be the designed experience only, without the possibility of extending the lesson to the context in which it was to be applied.

We were concerned that reflection on learning would include an exploration of the reasons for and subject matter of a process. We had to try and find ways in which the course would go beyond mere recipes for teaching and challenge learners to understand and make mental connections between process and content, and the weekly sessions and their teaching environment. Only then would they become able to design appropriate activities and conduct sessions themselves.

Within the institution's teaching methodology people did not learn from experience but from pre-defined text. The mode of learning did not involve reflection and understanding but unquestioning acceptance, rote learning, prayer and praise. The notion of reflecting on experience in this context was therefore problematic, as it challenged the notion of 'divine inspiration' by suggesting a rational and causal relationship between an experience and the learning derived from it.

We calculated that positive learning experiences would function as 'rewards' for having risked something new and different, and that these experiences would have the greatest effect in persuading participants to change their teaching methods.

One such experience which generated a lot of discussion, concern and some critical comments about the institution was a session focusing on simulations as a useful tool for creating the basis for reflection, affecting change in attitudes and practising alternative behaviour.

I had designed three role plays on typical situations of conflict as they occur in the Ministry. The first one dealt with the question of building maintenance and the distribution and allocation of tasks to residents. A fairly typical dynamic emerged with the man actually in charge of such work hijacking the process somewhat and short-cutting the potential learning. The debriefing- discussion generated suggestions about how decisions of work allocation could be made more democratically and how this might have a motivating effect on residents.

The second role play involved the problem of a roommate smoking - which is not permitted in the Ministry - in the room. The emotional crisis which precipitated the forbidden act was totally ignored, but, interestingly, the conflict was contained and dealt with in the room, and the situation lead to a general sharing of gripes about each other, without the accused being victimised.

The play was an affirming and rewarding experience for those involved. However, course participants failed to generalise the experience and draw broader conclusions about values, decision-making processes and responsibilities from it.

The conflict of the third play was located in a woman's dormitory and a fascinating situation emerged. The problem was too 'real' so that players did not manage to distance themselves from the action and think beyond the confines of what actually happens in such conflicts in the Ministry. The rules of the institution refer people involved in such conflict to the hierarchy; an outsider intervenes and 'solves' the problem through counselling.

In the ensuing discussion participants unpacked the fact that people had no problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills. The implicit criticism was that everything had to be referred 'upwards' and both residents and staff were totally disempowered to deal with problems themselves. They suggested other procedures to deal with such problems than the pre-scribed rules but then quickly added that these would need to involve the supervisors.

At this stage we withdrew to observe roles and allowed participants to decide whether and how to take the issue further. This non-interventionist approach was taken also in several other instances when serious questioning of the power hierarchy of the Ministry and it's effect on residents and staff happened. While such instances indicated to us the possibility of greater and further attitude change intervention, we could not make the necessary commitments to develop the critical stance of some staff members in an ongoing and sustained way.

While the session had been very engaging and learners expressed their recognition of the usefulness of the technique a subsequent 'homework' exercise which asked the staff to design appropriate simulations proved disastrous. It was clear that even with reinforcement and practise the group was unable to learn how to design and manage such an activity, as this would involve assuming a broader perspective and thinking of alternatives -

something which the discourse precludes from happening.

**What did we achieve? A Changed attitude to teaching or just a good time?**

Participants conducted their own evaluations of the course through a series of interviews and collectively written reports in response to given questions. The result was very positive: The process of active learning and participation in the shaping of the course were identified as particularly valuable and useful aspects of the course. This was described as "the change in approach from conventional methods to the new concept of facilitation" in which "you gather information by questioning"; and in which the 'all-knowing teacher' was replaced by a facilitator whose attitude changed "from 'I know' to 'you know'."

There was agreement that the learning climate had been relaxed and positive, encouraging participation and cooperation rather than putting pressure on the individual and promoting competition. The social aspect of the course and the fact that many of the staff members got to know each other better were emphasised as positive and important. "It brought me out of my shyness with others", and "we encouraged each other to work together," so that "the stronger carry the weaker and the weaker grow and the stronger step back and encourage." (Note how this statement totally reflects the authoritarian personality!) The need to establish a productive learning environment was perceived as an important consideration for the work with residents who often suffered from low self-esteem and a history of negative learning experiences.

Icebreakers and energising games, small group discussions and simulations were singled out as methods which could be (and had already been) usefully and productively employed as they encouraged learners to get actively involved.

The question "has the course changed the way in which you teach / facilitate?" was answered mostly positively again with reference to attempts to allow learners to get more actively involved. As one participant put it: "My attitude has changed in the way that I continually try to use the different methods we have been taught. The attitude change has been positive in the way that I can see from the course that I would be able to use what I have learnt in the future relating to what I will be doing."

In their assessment they voiced opinions which revealed a favourable attitude towards what they experienced. So they changed their attitude in that they began to recognise and be potentially open to a different teaching methodology. But this change in attitude towards learning and teaching is only the first step towards adopting an alternative method and putting it into practise in such way that one does not simply reproduce the process without the content.

Towards the second half of the ministry course participants were able to initiate energising games with success. However, if the purpose for introducing a participatory method was more complex the exercise was a failure. For example, one participant related how he had broken the large group of 400 residents up into smaller groups for the 60 minute evening prayer, and had suggested prayer in groups, rather than en masse. Clearly, the intention behind small group work had got lost completely: what was reproduced was the structure of the exercise, while at the same time retaining the process, including the control of the activity, which was still in the hands of the teacher. Had he considered allowing them to choose their own topic? No, but after some consideration he thought this was a good idea and he would try it the next time.

Another example in which the process of an exercise was decontextualised and stripped of it's purpose was a drawing activity conducted towards the end of the course as an example of a climate setting, introductory activity. We asked participants to draw a quick picture of themselves, something important in their lives, and a dream or aspiration. This activity was subsequently labelled a 'bad experience' as it had been perceived to be a painful 'character analysis' - the educational context and purpose for which it had been suggested was totally ignored. Reference to past life and thus a contextualisation of themselves in the world outside to some participants amounted to treading on forbidden ground.

Zimbardo et al suggest that in studying attitude change it helps to conceptualise attitudes as having three components: affect, cognition and behaviour. (Zimbardo et al p.20) The verbal statements of course participants show a positive emotional response to what they had been through: they liked the course. Where they fall very short is on the cognitive score: their statements are vague and broad, they reveal a lack of factual knowledge and understanding of the methodology. Checking this deficit against their behaviour inside the context of the course and outside it again serves as proof that for the duration of a session learners would talk about and in activities reveal a change in attitude, but beyond the course they would act differently, and within the 'old mould'.

While the idea of opinion sharing, discussion of different ideas and reflection was problematic course participants latched onto the participatory model of learning. The discovery of discussion groups and a process of learning with and from each other was a positive experience, they saw it's motivating force and they were more than willing to reproduce the process. They did, what so many progressive organisations and movements are also guilty of: they began to reproduce the idea of discussion groups, but without first setting up an experience as a basis on which to reflect. In this way, they went through the motions of 'discussion group' but mutilated the process from the purpose.

By now, course participants will remember what we did - but not

why, and how we did it - and in any attempt to try something different they might arrange the chairs in a circle, play a game, and ask learners to break into small groups. They will mechanistically reproduce the format of some of the exercises, without a clear purpose and structure. Beyond that, they will preach, unconverted to another pedagogy, 'the truth'.

### Why did we fail to change attitudes to teaching?

Was our purpose doomed to affect change in a closed institution doomed from the start? Did the methodology fail us, or we fail it? Or what went wrong? In order to find some answers to the question lets look again at the context, the contestants and the methodology of experiential learning.

#### 1. Context: the closed discourse

For a start, although there was a willingness to learn there was no perceived need for a change in attitude towards teaching: the staff felt secure in their positions as 'all-wise' holder of truth. While they were delighted to learn a few 'new tricks' for motivating residents, they are not truly concerned with education for critical thinking, but with conversion for conformity within the doctrine.

We were confronted by an awesome adversary: a closed discourse that has all the answers. The Ministry itself is in the business of changing attitudes: they pick people off the streets and by introducing them to the Gospel hope to change their life styles. And, if we are to believe them, they are successful. Maybe a look at how they do it will provide us with the answer to how and why we failed. How do they do it?

Firstly, people who enter the Ministry are desperate and extremely vulnerable. This potentially makes them putty in the hands of anyone who wishes to affect change. This is not to say though, that the strategies employed are not well thought out and managed. There is, for a start, a full-time person working in public relations and fundraising and his marketing, advertising and public relation skills are so remarkable, that he is able to easily sustain the financial operation of the institution.

Secondly, the institution with it's closed discourse is a powerful medium for conversion. Zimbardo, Ebbesen and Maslach (p.164) remind us that "you cannot put cucumbers into a vinegar barrel and expect them not to emerge as pickles." It is impossible to escape the doctrine in the Ministry: after spending a number of hours 'inside' one feels totally immersed in The Ministry's doctrine. Learning, suggests Seid, is almost by osmosis: you soak it up by simply being there. (Seid 1992, p.4)

Within this context of 'persuasion' there is a more deliberate 'total onslaught' strategy for attitude change, namely by

providing for the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of the residents, and by removing their need but also ability to make informed choices and decisions, by creating dependencies. (eg through offering child-care to street workers)

Thirdly, in terms of the education offered the transmission model is seductively simple and replicable, but it is also effective for reproduction of information as the history of school teaching shows. Within the Ministry it is uniquely workable: these adults are truly 'empty vessels' having been rid of their personal histories and as yet devoid of other distracting beliefs. A closed discourse that asks no questions and demands nothing beyond adherence to it's rules is very inviting, particularly for people who have failed the system (or the system them), and who are seeking answers, rather than critical analysis, probing thinking and the challenges of contradictory discourses and theories.

Zimbardo et al ask: "Does the power of persuasion lie in the mysterious and unlearnable talents of select individuals, or in the efficacy of the techniques of attitude and behaviour change that these people happen to use?" (Zimbardo et al, p. 49) The teachers in the Ministry are clearly imbued with mysterious talents, because their 'talents' and 'techniques' belong to the Holy Spirit, which speaks and acts through them when they teach.

In the Ministry teaching and learning is unambiguous:

"- The aim of the teacher is to bring Christ into the learners lives;

- Learning happens when the Holy Spirit enters a learner;
- One knows when learning is happening through a change in attitude and a willingness to accept Christ;
- Learners know what and weather they have learned when they feel the Holy Spirit move inside them.
- The learners' behaviour can all be attributed to the lack of Christ in their lives." (Seid, 1992. p.5)

The trump card held in this 'education' process is the evidence which the institution provides of the rewards for conversion: the teachers themselves are living proof and provide the role models for any learners, for were they not all where the learners used to be before receiving Christ in their lives?

The resillience to our various attempts at breaking open the closed discourse and suggestion some small measure of change was remarkable. Not wanting to cause upset we followed Daloz' suggestion that educators can "toss little bits of disturbing information in their students' paths, little facts and observations, theories and interpretations - cow plops on the road to truth - that raise questions about their students' world views and invite them to entertain alternatives, to close the dissonance, accommodate their structures, think afresh." (quoted in: Brookfield, 1987. pg 92)

Every time we introduced bits of contradiction participants

responded as if we were testing the steadfastness of their belief: they closed up, they stopped listening and became 'glassy-eyed'. For every question and dissonance they consulted the scriptures for guidance and relied on the doctrine to provide them with an answer. In terms of the Ministry there is only one truth and any attempts at questioning it would be seen as a rebellion against the Gospel. Seid reports that in an interview with the leader he informed her that "There is no compromise. The truth cannot be adapted to suit human needs." (Seid, 1992. p.2)

Our attempts to change the attitudes of learners might have modified the views of individual staff members towards teaching. But are they in a position to change their practises within the existing circumstances of the given context? The 'vinegar barrel' is still the substance in which the cucumbers are immersed - and no amount of adding other ingredients and tastes, particularly if added for intermittent short periods only, will change the basic 'pickle taste'.

## 2. The methodology

Our 'secular' methodology offers no cut and dry answers. The staff in the Ministry operate with clear messages: if someone needs counselling, or if someone has a problem they are offered a quotation from the Gospel: this is your (already interpreted, pre-digested) answer. We contradicted this process by suggesting that problems can be solved through an active process of identifying the problem, searching for causes, clarifying information gathered, analysing and examining the evidence. This process fundamentally contradicts the dogma which suggests that if people believe and pray hard enough their problems will be sorted out. Our offer of going through a problem -analysis was rejected with the comment: "We cannot explain this to a non-believer".

### Role modelling

Brookfield (1987) identifies the following characteristics as exhibited by good role-modelers: clarity, consistency, openness, communicativeness, specificity and accessibility. The summative evaluation gives a clear indication that the role models we provided were one of the most effective ways of negotiating our educational approach and imparting some of the skills for initiating it.

The reports were full of concrete examples of what we had done, the activation of learners through participatory exercises being one which was particularly appreciated. In addition to being clear and consistent we had been open about our intentions, while the design and interactions had respected the learners' problems and the strength they derive from the discourse they have adopted. Instead of being openly critical of their educational approach and methods, we actively encouraged criticism of our methodology, and were at pains to explain the underlying reasons

for our choices and actions. Our communicativeness was only reciprocated by some people towards the end of the course - and our success at triggering a multi-perspective view and an openness towards sharing of critical ideas was limited indeed.

One needs to go beyond Brookfield's 'characteristics' in order to answer why we failed as role models. For a start, the characteristics of educators - "the broad repertoire of pedagogic, modelling and interpersonal skills" (ibid p.88) may say something about the practise of an educator, yet very little about the learning. While role modelling had been a conscious strategy in our educational endeavour this may be another case of 'we taught them but they didn't learn'.

In the case of the Ministry course I would assert it was not so much an inadequate role- modelling performance, as an inappropriate context in which it took place. Is it possible to create a dialogical educator within a closed doctrine - discourse? It appears that Brookfield was talking from a context in which he is developing educators who have already been 'converted' to the school of educating for critical thinking. When confronted by those who are buttressed against the school of critical thinking Brookfield's theory would be put to the test, indeed.

#### Teaching how to teach

There is no recipe for initiating learning based on experience. The numerous graphical models of designing by means of a learning cycle, learning curve or learning spiral all have one seemingly deceptively simple thing in common: they present a model of a process in which experience is turned into learning via a process of carefully designed and managed reflection.

The reality of teaching people to translate this model into a session design and managing the process is harder. Experiential learning is based on highly skilled trainers/educators, who can lead learners along an intense and often difficult path of review, analysis, reflection, generalisation and finally application. This process cannot be taught in 3 quick and easy steps, but a lot of the skill is developed through experience and practise. It's time consuming to learn how to manage experience-based learning; it demands intensive training which cannot be done on a mass-base. Importantly, it relies on an 'ideology of difference' rather than dogma, and it requires a support network of like-minded people who reinforce the process and at times function as sounding boards.

Unlike the teachers of the doctrine who aim at reproduction our intention was not to produce good disciples nor efficient functionaries of 'the discussion method'. We lacked the necessary time and we were up against another system. Furthermore, we repeatedly pointed out to the coordinator that course participants needed to be given a chance to apply their new skills. But only during his final speech at the end of the course he cheerfully declared: "I purposefully did not tell

people where they would slot in (to teaching) because I wanted to see how they would react." But they were not to worry, because he would allocate people to their duties, tell them what and how to teach and hand them the materials.

The lack of ongoing application meant that neither we, nor the participants had a clear indication of how they would use their new teaching skills. Nebulous references to the 'life skills programme' were never concretised beyond 'the importance of personal hygiene' and self-discipline, pertaining particularly to making a mess at meal times. This was one of the greatest weaknesses of the course.

We failed to convert but I believe we could not have succeeded.

### **A plea for experiential education: despite it's shortcomings**

Set up and managed properly, experiential education can lead learners to a sense of achievement and possibly the realisation that 'i did it all by myself'. I hope that the staff of the Ministry will carry forward the positive experience which we provided for them and remember it one day as something worth while exploring further.

Clearly, these are no quick-fix solutions - and this is probably the greatest draw-back of the experiential approach to attitude changing: it takes time, it needs to be set up, managed and followed up carefully, and it is very person-intensive: this method cannot cater for the masses. But unlike the Ministry's 'preaching the truth' I believe this methodology can achieve a more long-term change in attitude and effect.

The greatest 'con' of the seductive transformation process in the Ministry is that it does not have to withstand the test of reality. Upon completion of the 50-day course residents can opt for further training and proceed to the Bible School, the Disciple school or join the Outreach programme. If they are not ready to test their strength in life outside the institution they do not have to transfer immediately. And once they are gone - who is to say if the attitude change is lasting, if the Ministry's doctrine holds in a reality where miracles are not in evidence?

Why will I carry on with my approach, unconverted to the old transmission model? In the long run I want to be part of a society that has developed a culture of open and free dialogue. Managed correctly, and given a context of emancipated individuals who are able to take charge of their lives and have a say over the control of the means of production, people who are creative and cooperative, the experiential mode is a useful model for assisting people to learn how to critically analyse, problem-solve and be self-sufficient and reliant. For myself, possibly rather idealistically I do not wish to participate in a process which perpetuates a system of dependency in which the powers that be control the education to reproduce it's conditions of being,

rather than question and challenge it.

"to be literate is not simply to know something; it also means knowing how to participate reflectively in the very act of producing knowledge. It also mean learning the limits and partialness of specific languages, cultures, and experiences in terms of both the positive and the negative impacts that they have had and might have in contributing to the construction of a democratic state." (Giroux, 1989.p.xi)

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